


toumani diabate

WITH

ballake sissoko



1. B
i
L
A
M
B
A
M

2. S
A
L
A
M
A
N

3. K
i
T
A
K
A
i
R
A

4. B
A
F
O
U
L
A
B
E

5. C
H
E
i
K
H
N
A
D
E
M
B
A

6. K
O
R
A
B
A
L
i

7. K
A
D
i
A
T
O
U

8. Y
A
M
F
A

New Ancient Strings

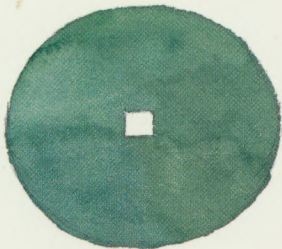
NOUVELLES CORDES ANCIENNES



"Dazzling...atmospheric music that surrounds, lulls and transports, but it can also pin you on the spot, drop-jawed at the awesome technique. In short, you need it." —*Folk Roots* (UK)

Inspired by the legendary recording *Ancient Strings* (*Cordes Anciennes*) by the great kora masters Sidiki Diabate (Toumani's father) and Djelimadi Sissoko (Ballake's father), *New Ancient Strings* takes the 21-stringed African harp-lute to new heights on an album of pure instrumental duets.

1. Bi Lambam 2. Salaman 3. Kita Kaira 4. Bafoulabe
5. Cheikhna Demba 6. Kora Bali 7. Kadiatou 8. Yamfa



All music composed by Toumani Diabate.
Published by Rykomusic Ltd. All rights for North & South America administered by Rykomusic Inc.
All rights for the rest of the world administered by Rykomusic Ltd.

® & © 1999 Rykodisc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized duplication is a violation of applicable laws. Printed in the USA. Manufactured in Canada.


Rykodisc USA, Shetland Park, 27 Congress Street, Salem, MA 01970.

Rykodisc Ltd, 78 Stanley Gardens, London W3 7SZ. E-mail: info@rykodisc.com or visit www.rykodisc.com

toumani diabate

WITH

ballake sissoko



1. B
i
L
A
M
B
A
M

2. S
A
L
A
M
A
N

3. K
i
T
A
K
A
i
R
A

4. B
A
F
O
U
L
A
B
E

5. C
H
E
i
K
H
N
A
D
E
M
B
A

6. K
O
R
A
B
A
L
i

7. K
A
D
i
A
T
O
V

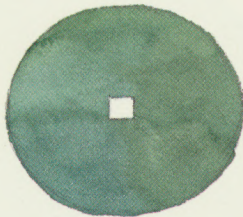
8. Y
A
M
F
A

New Ancient Strings

NOUVELLES CORDES ANCIENNES

1. Bi Lambam 2. Salaman 3. Kita Kaira 4. Bafoulabe
5. Cheikhna Demba 6. Kora Bali 7. Kadiatou 8. Yamfa

All music composed by Toumani Diabate.
Published by Rykomusic Ltd. All rights for North & South America administered by Rykomusic Inc.
All Rights for the rest of the World administered by Rykomusic Ltd.



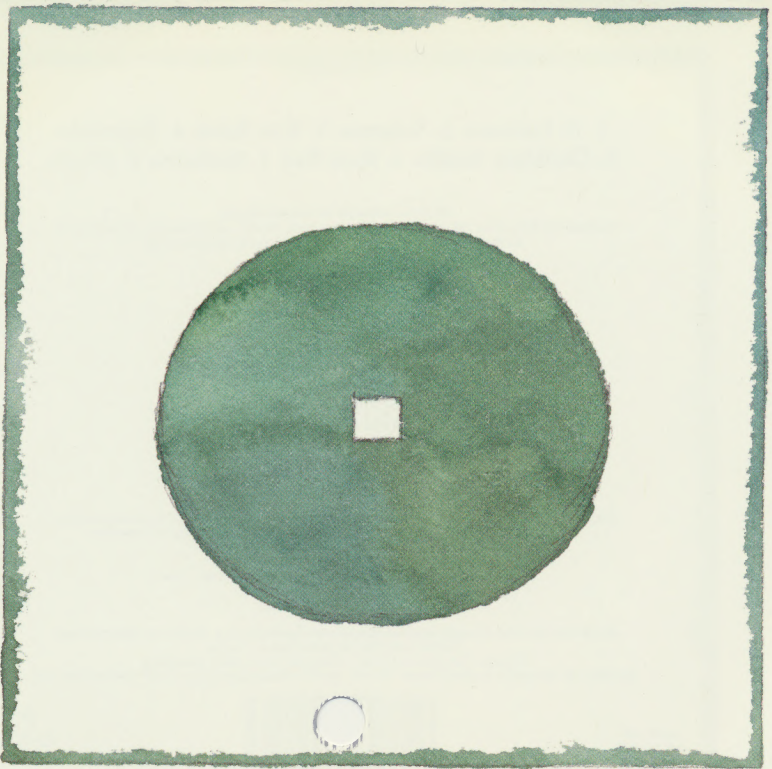
Recorded in Bamako, Mali at the Palais de Congres, on 22nd Sept, 1997 (Mali's Independence Day)
Recorded at 20 bit resolution in a natural acoustic, without any artificial reverberation
Producer Lucy Duran
Recorded by Nick Parker
Studio editing Nick Parker & Tim Handley at Audio Edit, London
Photos by Lucy Duran
Artwork by Olivia Design

© & ©1999 Rykodisc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized duplication is a violation of applicable laws.
Printed in the USA. Manufactured in Canada.
Rykodisc USA, Shetland Park, 27 Congress Street, Salem, MA 01970.
Rykodisc Ltd, 78 Stanley Gardens, London W3 7SZ. E-mail: info@rykodisc.com or visit www.rykodisc.com

HNCD 1428

LC 07433





fonmani diabate
batouke sissoko



New Ancient Strings / Nouvelles Cordes Anciennes

Hannibal HNCD 1428

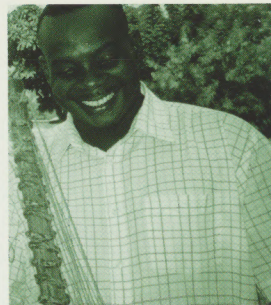


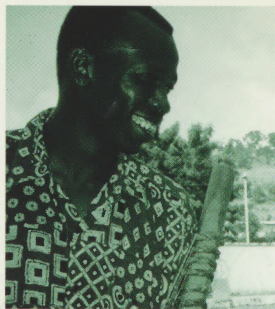
The instrument

The kora is one of Africa's greatest musical instruments. With its 21 strings in two parallel rows, this harp-lute is unique to the Mande people of West Africa who once ruled the great Mali empire. The kora is universally appreciated as a world-class solo instrument in its own right, as well as in collaborations in a wide range of musical styles including jazz, techno-rock and flamenco music. One of the people most responsible for making the kora known around the world is Toumani Diabate. He has developed his own unique and inimitable style of playing which is intensely melodic and exhibits extraordinary virtuosity.

Toumani Diabate

The most brilliant, and best known exponent of the kora is undoubtedly Toumani Diabate, from Mali. Toumani was born in 1965 in Bamako into a great kora playing family - his father, the late Sidiki Diabate, was known throughout West Africa as the "king of the kora" and is held responsible for popularising the kora in Mali. Although Toumani largely taught himself to play the kora, the aggressive improvisatory style pioneered by his father is clearly evident in Toumani's own playing. In 1987 (then just 21 years old), Toumani broke into the international concert scene with his highly acclaimed album *Kaira* (HNCD 1338), still the best-selling kora album, and one of the few that features the instrument on its own, without voices or other instruments. After *Kaira*, Toumani collaborated on a number of projects, including the two highly acclaimed *Songhai* albums, *Songhai* (HNCD 1323) and *Songhai 2* (HNCD 1383). These albums featured Toumani performing with the renowned flamenco group *Ketama*. He continues to live in Bamako, capital of Mali, where he performs widely with his own group, the *Symmetric Orchestra*, as a trio with *Keletigui Diabate* on *balafon*, and *Basekou Kouyate* on *ngoni*, with whom he recorded the album *Djelika* (HNCD 1380). *New Ancient Strings* is Toumani's fifth album.





Djelimoussa “Ballake” Sissoko

Ballake (born 1967 in Bamako) has lived next door to Toumani in Bamako all his life, and the two (who are distant cousins) have grown up playing together, developing similar but complementary styles. Ballake is the son of one of Mali's greatest musicians, the late Jelimadi Sissoko, who was the regular accompanist to Toumani's father, and who was a founder member of Mali's legendary Ensemble Instrumental National (EIN) du Mali. Aged only 14, Ballake was invited to join the EIN in 1981; he left to take up a solo career in 1988, when he became the accompanist to legendary diva Kandia Kouyate. As part of her ensemble, Ballake has performed at major festivals in the USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and throughout Africa. He has also recorded with other famed Malian divas such as Ami Koita and Bako Dagnon, with whom he performs regularly in Bamako. This is his first album with Toumani.



The album

New Ancient Strings features purely instrumental kora duets, recorded in a natural acoustic in Bamako. It takes as its inspiration the first album ever released of instrumental kora music – Ancient Strings (Cordes Anciennes), recorded in Mali in 1970, featuring the two greatest masters of the kora of the time: Sidiki Diabate (Toumani's father) and Djelimadi Sissoko (Ballake's father). This truly great album quickly became a symbol of Mali's national identity, a testimony to its great musical heritage from the days of the Mali empire, dating back to the early 13th century, and to the remarkable musicianship of these two late kora players. Ancient Strings is still played on Mali's national radio to mark all major national occasions, such as Independence Day (22nd September).

New Ancient Strings features, for the first time, the sons of those masters playing some of the same pieces. These entirely new versions reflect the evolution of kora music over the past decades. This is Toumani's first album of purely instrumental kora music in 11 years, and his playing shows a new maturity. The breathtaking virtuosity already well evident in Kaira, is now tempered with deeper emotional intensity, and haunting melodic beauty. Ballake adds his own dazzlingly precise rhythm, punchy bass lines, and ringing variations. Since the mid 1980s these two young kora musicians have both been, in different ways, at the vanguard of Malian music, developing it, enriching its textures and taking the technical possibilities of the kora to new heights.

Together, their 42 strings weave an intricate and seamless tapestry of ornamental variations, lyrical melodies and flowing rhythms. Their music is rooted in the timeless classical tradition of the Mali that was once, during the pre-colonial era, played at the courts of kings and emperors; but it is reworked to the contemporary styles that are currently in favour in Bamako – the hot-house of many of West Africa's finest musicians.



The tracks

The album features some of the great classics of the Malian tradition, reworked by Toumani into entirely new versions.



1. *Bi Lambam*, (“Today’s lambam”) is a new version of Lambam, the lively, rolling melody that for centuries has been the theme tune of Mali’s griots, the hereditary occupational group of musicians who formerly played for the kings and emperors. Both Toumani and Ballake were born into griot families. Lambam (a word which originally was the name of the graceful dance of the griots) celebrates the art of the griots and though it dates back to the 13th century, it remains a central part of the griot repertoire, here presented in a dazzling contemporary reworking.

2. *Salaman* is based on a poignant love song called Tita, and is typical of the music from western Mali, with its shifting minor harmonies. Toumani created this version to reflect the original song lyrics, which are about the power, intensity, and fickleness of love, so readily betrayed. One of the most beautiful pieces in Toumani’s repertoire, he dedicates it to a Malian patron, called Salama Sow.

3. *Kita Kaira* is a version of the classic tune Kaira (which means “peace”, the title track of Toumani’s first album), which was first made famous by Toumani’s father Sidiki in the 1940s. This new version was created by Toumani in the style of Kita, a town in north-west Mali from which both his and Ballake’s family originally came before migrating first to Gambia (at the turn of the century) and then back to Mali after the 2nd World War. Kita was the centre of a powerful kingdom at the time of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali empire in 1235, and has always been famous for its musicians and its intensely beautiful melodies.

4. *Bafoulabe* (“the meeting of two rivers”) is loosely based on one of the great tunes from the Mande griot repertoire, Mali Sajio. It commemorates the shooting of a hippopotamus in Bafoulabe, a small town in the savannah region of north-west Mali where the Senegal and Bafing rivers meet. The hippo is normally considered a destructive animal, but this one was loved by all the villagers, and with this song they mourned its loss. Toumani composed this version in three variations, starting with an angular, stately melody punctuated by the players striking the kora’s wooden handles with the first fingers, before dissolving into lyrical, hymn-like variations.

5. *Cheikhna Demba* is a pentatonic tune in the Bambara musical style of central Mali, from the former kingdom of Segou. It was originally composed in honour of an 18th century king, Bambuguchi Diarra, who built a wide irrigation canal that stretches from the river Niger some 40 kms to his village. This version, dedicated to Toumani’s patron Cheikhna Demba, has a bright, compelling rhythm and lightness of touch that is reminiscent of Irish harp.

6. *Kora Bali* (“it never dies”) is Toumani’s version of Tutu Diarra, a well-known Mande griot piece that is much favoured by today’s musicians in Mali, and exists in countless variations. Tutu Diarra was another 18th century king from the Bambara kingdom of Segou. Toumani composed this version to recreate some of the brilliant variations, gradually increasing in tempo, that his father Sidiki played with Ballake’s father Djelimadi on Ancient Strings.

7. *Kadiatou* is based on a piece called Baninde (“to refuse”), dedicated to a 19th century king, Sanuge Gimba, who ruled Kaba, a town near the border with Guinea. In the Mande way of thinking, only those who are truly great and powerful have the freedom to refuse something; others must accept whatever they are told to do. Toumani dedicates this version to his late sister, Kadiatou Diabate, who passed away from an untimely illness not long after recording this album.

8. *Yamfa* (“forgive”) is Toumani’s reworking of another of his favourite kora pieces, Alla l’aa ke (featured on his first album Kaira). One of the great virtuoso kora tunes, this new version emphasises its lyrical melody, based on a song Toumani’s mother Nene Koita composed.

New Ancient Strings was recorded on September 22nd, 1997 (Mali's Independence Day) in Bamako, in the marble rooms of the newly built Palais de Congres, on state of the art 20-bit digital equipment by the original team who recorded Kaira (engineer Nick Parker, producer Lucy Duran). It was recorded in a single night, straight through - without rehearsal or retakes, in a natural acoustic, and has been mastered without any artificial reverberation. What you hear is what they play. No added effects, no other instruments or vocals, just flowing, virtuoso kora at its finest, most brilliant, and lyrical.

Lucy Duran



The disc was recorded in a natural acoustic using omnidirectional microphones feeding high-resolution recorders.

This statement might not sound very remarkable in itself, but location recordings in West Africa present some interesting challenges of their own. I was always keen to record these extraordinary instruments in a real acoustic if at all possible, avoiding the use of boxed artificial reverberation. However, there are almost no buildings in Mali which have anything we would normally describe as "an acoustic". Wall and floor finishes are mostly porous and create a dry and unyielding sound. Those buildings which did offer any benign reflective surfaces were situated in built-up areas and therefore suffered from constant traffic or other environmental noise.

After days of venue prospecting we managed to negotiate the night-time use of a marble vestibule between two acoustically-dead meeting rooms in the Palais de Congres, the recently constructed Sino-French built conference centre in Bamako. In this hermetic space, the traffic noise was only barely perceptible. Apart from a large cicada-like creature hiding somewhere in the building, we were completely undisturbed for the whole session. This is rare enough even in conventional European location recording sessions, but all the more extraordinary when you take into account how very quiet these instruments sound in reality.

Nick Parker

Thanks to:

Le Palais de Congres, Bamako

Joyce Miller

(for her marvelous hospitality and support in Mali!
thank you Joyce!)

Nick Parker

Ousmane Haidara



Toumani Diabate
with Ballake Sissoko

New Ancient Strings
Nouvelles Cordes Anciennes

HNCD 1428

Toumani Diabate
with Ballake Sissoko

New Ancient Strings
Nouvelles Cordes Anciennes



HNCD 1428

LC07433

